

THE
GOSPEL MESSAGE.

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Of the Alabama Conference.

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The Holy Scriptures set forth the Gospel under the idea of a Message from God unto man. But as multitudes of those to whom this Message has been sent, treat it with contempt or neglect, two inquiries are naturally suggested : Is this Message spurious ? Or is it unimportant ? On one or the other of these grounds alone, can its rejection be justified.

Let us inquire, first, Is this Message spurious ?

It does not appear to be so without examination, whatever it may appear to be on a strict scrutiny. No man, therefore, can justify himself in rejecting it, as not genuine, till he has proved it false. There are two circumstances which sustain this position.

The first is this : Thousands and tens of thousands of persons, of both sexes, of all ages, of every clime, of every caste in society, of every grade of intellect, in every possible way, have examined this Message—they

have satisfied themselves of its genuineness, and multitudes of them have governed themselves accordingly. Now, although it is impossible to determine any question rationally on this basis alone, yet, with such a cloud of witnesses, before his eyes, no man can be justified in treating this professedly divine Message with contempt or neglect.

The second circumstance is this: Every thing about man proclaims him to be a religious being—all men possess moral instincts that loudly demand a religious system, to the origination of which they are utterly inadequate: they must, therefore, be dependent on some extraneous, that is to say, divine power for its production. In view of this fact, numerous systems have been devised and offered to the acceptance of man, all of which profess to be of celestial origin. Some of them have the mark of the beast in their forehead, and therefore their spuriousness can be readily detected by the most credulous and unwary. Others, with fairer pretensions, have been weighed in the balances of reason and common sense, and have been found wanting. All of these, of course, must be rejected. But here is a system which comes to us with superior and exclusive claims—it professes to be the great *desideratum*, the divine *catholicon* of which we are in quest. Its appearance, to say the least, is honest and prepossessing, as if it were worthy of all acceptation. Now, can any man

be just to himself—can he be true to the moral instincts of his nature—can he regard the yearnings of universal humanity, while he refuses to canvass the claims of a system so obviously promising and apparently divine?

Here, then, is the Message. Look at it! Do you not see the broad seals of the King of heaven? Open it! Do you not trace the autograph of God?

Though you never saw them before, yet you know that these are the royal seals. You know that the wonderful acts performed by Christ, to authenticate his mission, and similar wonders wrought by his apostles, with a like design, were far above the unassisted powers of men. You know that these signs were publicly and frequently exhibited—that they challenged the strictest scrutiny—that their preternatural character was admitted by those who were malicious enough to deny it, had not the confession been extorted from them, that a great and notable miracle hath been wrought among us, is manifest, and we cannot deny it—that these divine wonders produced conviction in the minds and change in the lives of thousands who beheld them—that they were recorded shortly after they were performed—that contemporary historians corroborated the facts—and that friends and foes have preserved the record.

The miracles were, therefore, wrought. It is for you to determine, whether or not any being in the universe,

besides the Omnipotent God, can, without medical or surgical means, in a moment, by a touch, a word, a look, give sight to the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, cause the lame to walk, strengthen the paralytic, cleanse the lepers, and raise the dead. It is for you to determine, whether or not any power, short of divine, can control the winds and seas, feed thousands of men to fulness from a scanty luncheon, and by a mere word cause a flourishing fig-tree to wither away—reversing, as it were, the miracle by which a withered branch was made to bud and blossom, and bring forth fruit.

If you rationally conclude that these are the works of God alone, it remains for you to say, whether or not he would interpose his omnipotence in support of imposture. The suggestion shows that the argument is alike pertinent and unanswerable. Its force may, indeed, be parried, but by nothing better than by babblement or blasphemy.

Here are Prophecies. The antiquity of the Old Testament is not disputed by any sensible, candid man. All the world knows that it contains the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of an ancient nation. Two thousand years ago it was translated into the Greek language, and placed in the Alexandrine library, by which means, as well as by other agencies, heathen poets, philosophers, and legislators, became acquainted with its contents. This book is full of predictions.

The wonderful and various fortunes of the Hebrew people are here prophetically portrayed, and the History of Josephus, the Jew, is the record of their fulfilment; and the present condition of his race, is the test of their truth.

The hostile and independent character of the descendants of Ishmael is graphically presented in the book of Genesis; and the past career and present state of the Arabs incontestably prove that Moses, the prophet, was, what he has been styled, a "man of God."

The overthrow and complete destruction of the strong, magnificent, and promising monarchies and metropolises of the ancient world—Nineveh and Babylon, Idumea and Rabbah, Moab and Philistia, Tyre and Zidon.—so minutely foretold by the prophets, and so strikingly accomplished; according to the testimony of modern travelers—Volney, Layard, Rich, Botta, Bonomi, Fisk, Keith, Stephens, Olia, Robinson, Rawlinson, Lynch, Stanley, and others, friends and foes of those ancient seers—most clearly prove that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

In like manner were all the predictions concerning the Messiah verified. Compare them with the Evangelical narratives of the birth, ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, and you have overwhelming proof of their fulfilment.

So also the prophecies pronounced by Christ and his

apostles, have all been accomplished, or they are now in a train of accomplishment. Witness that remarkable prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem—the period of its fall—the actors in the scene—the completeness of the ruin—and the perpetuity of the desolation : then ask Titus, the conquering Gentile, and Josephus, the conquered Jew, Julian, the Apostate, and Gibbon, his apologist—ask the triumphal arch at Rome—ask the *Judæa capta* medals, which for eighteen centuries have commemorated the fact—ask the haughty Turk, by whom the holy place is contemptuously trodden down, despite chivalric crusaders and protecting czars—ask the cosmopolite Hebrew, who is the miraculously personified fulfilment of prophecy—ask all these, and they will all tell you that those predictions were “the true sayings of God.” Yes, *the true sayings of God* ; for all admit that foreknowledge is an attribute of God alone ; consequently those venerable vaticinations are true ; and, being true, are divine ; and, being divinely true, they unequivocally authenticate the document in which they are contained.

And now for the document itself.*

What would you expect it to contain ? This is a difficult question, and without the aid of the revelation of which this document professes to be the record, you might be at a loss to answer it. You profess to have some rational conception of the divine character ; and

we shall not inquire from what source you have derived it. From your acquaintance with the parties, what would you expect a revelation from God to man to contain?

You would probably expect to find *Novelty*, as a leading element in a divine system of religion. If it contain nothing with which we were not previously acquainted, we may well ask, *Cui bono?*—what is the use of the revelation? But will not every heathen, to whom this Message is announced, exclaim with astonishment, “We have heard strange things to-day!” Strange indeed! For the Biblical account of the Origin, Fall, Redemption, Duty, and Destiny of man, has never been dreamed of by three-fourths of our race—and these not merely ignorant barbarians, but also poets and philosophers, princes and priests; for “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,” the things disclosed by this revelation.

You would probably expect to find *Mystery* in a system of Divinity. Treating on the being and perfections of the infinite Jehovah—developing the character and fortunes of so wonderful a creature as man—enlarging on a subject so complicated as religion and morals,—you would certainly reject it, at least you ought to reject it, if it were not mysterious in its revelations. But if you examine the record, you will find in it mysteries that are equal to any found in the vol-

umes of providence and nature—mysteries above the loftiest flights of human reason. Three Persons in one Divine Nature—two Natures in one Divine Person—the renovation of the soul—the resurrection of the body,—these doctrines, and others of this class, constitute a constellation of mysteries, which painfully dazzle the eyes of every one who looks steadily at them.

You would probably expect to find *Purity* in a system of divine revelation. Inspired by a Being, who is considered by every rational theist as glorious in holiness, you would look for its complexion and features to bespeak its parentage—you would look for it to discountenance impurity of every kind and degree. Look into the glorious gospel of the blessed God—canvass its principles, precepts, and promises—and you will discover that it everywhere inculcates the loftiest grade of moral purity—makes provision for its attainment—and pronounces it indispensable to the enjoyment of future blessedness.

You would, perhaps, expect to find in a system which makes exclusive pretensions, and challenges acceptance of the whole world, a peculiar adaptedness to all the various characters and conditions of mankind. Examine it, and you will find it, though inflexible in its constitution, as suitable for the rich as for the poor, and for the poor as for the rich—constructed to answer the demands of Jew and Gentile, Barbarian and Scythian,

bond and free—fitted to every meridian and latitude—adopted to either sex and to every age—a catholic religion.

You would, perhaps expect to find such a system connected with a superhuman influence to give it a vital and saving effect on the hearts and lives of those who embrace it. At any rate, in view of the depravity and helplessness of human nature; that is what you ought to expect. If you do, you need not fear disappointment; for the gospel guarantees the working of that mighty power which enables those who receive it to comply with its requisitions and to realize its promises; so that the evangelical system itself is characterized as “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

Now, let us ask you, if all this does not prove that the Gospel Message was written by the hand of God; and if this, with the royal seal, does not prove its genuineness and authority, then no fact has ever been proved true, and no truth is susceptible of proof.

It thus appears that those who excuse themselves from receiving this Message, cannot consistently assign its spuriousness as the reason.

.. Let us see if this Message is unimportant.

It seems, indeed, superfluous to refute such a position, as it is impious to maintain it; for if the gospel be admitted to be true, one would consider it, not mere-

ly weak or wicked; but impossible to doubt its importance.

The Source of the Message is sufficient to demonstrate its importance.

It "cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Surely none of the movements of God are beneath the notice of man! The infinite Jehovah knows which is most conducive to our happiness, the well-being of the universe, and his own glory. He cannot be indisposed to select the best means to accomplish the most desirable ends; and if there could have been any better system of religion devised than that which he has made known to the world, the fact could not have been unknown to his infinite intelligence, or placed beyond the range of his infinite resources—and no one will say that his goodness does not run parallel with his wisdom and power. We have, therefore, good reason to conclude that the plan of salvation is as perfect as it could possibly be made—that it is the master-piece of God; and if we consider it a small affair, it is very obvious that he does not! When he surveyed the six days' work of creation, he pronounced it all very good; and we have no evidence that he forms a lower estimate of the new creation.

The work of redemption goes forth with the *imprimatur* of Heaven. God is not ashamed to be called

its author. Were it possible for us to be assured of its divine original without examining it, we should be justified in pronouncing it worthy of all acceptance. It is easy enough to think, feel, and speak too lightly concerning it; but we do not fear that any one will overstate its importance. It is a message from God unto man; and you may imagine the interests it involves. No matter what may be its specific character, we may not make light of it, for it cannot fail to be a weighty affair. "Thus saith the Lord," is its pregnant preface: "I am the Lord," is its sanctioning close; and can the great Jehovah be a party to a paltry business? and must it not be paltry, if those whom it personally concerns may condemn it with impunity? The reasoning of the Jews, in their dilemma concerning John's dispensation, is pertinent and conclusive in regard to the Gospel: "If it be from Heaven, why do ye not then believe it?" Can it be trivial, if it be true? can it be unimportant, if it be divine?

Look at the medium by which it is communicated to man.

The Gospel does not come with vague utterances in nature and providence, addressed to reason and conscience, scarcely comprehended by the one or acknowledged by the other. Nor does it come through lying mediums that pretend to have intercourse with "familiar spirits and wizards that peep and that mutter"—

base and contemptible charlatans, that profess to have correspondence with men who have been long since dead and many of them damned—a hopeful channel for celestial communications! Such wretched knaves and miserable dupes come to us in no questionable shape; and he must be shallow indeed who can imagine that any of their silly and profane revelations proceed from either a “spirit of health or goblin damned”—that such inspirations are either “airs from heaven or blasts from hell”—except, indeed, as the Prince of darkness has an agency in all the fraud and folly perpetrated in the universe. Knowledge and virtue, truth and godliness, are outraged, not promoted, by such necromantic knavery. Nor is the Gospel a system of divine original, but of mere human administration. Human agents, indeed, ere and ever have been, employed in repeating and enforcing the message of its mercy to the world. But the great Medium of communication is One greater than man or angel, even “the Lord from heaven.” “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so,

much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Heb. i. A message of some importance, we should think, to require One so exalted as the messenger. Not an Iris—not a Mercury—but a God, a God, indeed, appears!—for "the Word was with God, and the Word was God—and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"—and he would hardly have appeared on a trifling errand.

God was manifested in the flesh; the Word *became incarnate* and dwelt among us, in order to deliver his message—of grace and truth. Indeed, there could have been no message—except a message of wrath—to deliver, without his incarnation; for "God was made man, for man to die." This is the burden of the message: "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." The message of God's mercy to man could be written only in blood. Angels, indeed, may publish it from heaven; men may publish it on the earth—and thousands of them are divinely commissioned so to do—but the God-man must proclaim the message himself. He alone can reveal the mind and will, the mercy and grace of the Father; through his mediatorship alone, the offended Majesty of the universe can make

“God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ,” says the apostle, “and hath committed to us the ministry of reconciliation : to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

What a ministry is this!—an extension, as it were, of Christ’s-own ministry—valid and available, only as representing him, acting under his authority, and by the aid of his Spirit. “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” So was it in the beginning—so is it still—so shall it continue to be—until by this combination of divine and human agencies, the message of salvation shall be sounded in the ears, and brought home to the hearts of all mankind.

Such measures would not be had in requisition for the promulgation of this message, if it were not of some importance. Heaven would scarcely employ such messengers, and so many of them, at so vast expense, and with so much solemnity, “to fetch and carry nonsense” from God to man, and to tell idle tales all over the world, from age to age!

Contemplate the consequences of the reception or rejection of this message.

Were the whole world to accept it, earth would be instantly changed into an Eden—Paradise would be regained. Were the whole world to reject it, the star of hope would set beneath the horizon of earth, and would never rise again! With its reception are connected blessings beyond description and enumeration—blessings for the soul and body—blessings for time and eternity! With its rejection are connected curses in number and intenseness beyond all conception—curses for the soul and the body—curses for time and eternity!

The message invites us to a feast. It is no small affair—no mere morsel which a man eats alone;—no “dinner of herbs,” unsavory even to a longing appetite—but it is a social, bountiful, and rich entertainment. “In this mountain,” to cite the tempting terms by which the prophet describes it, “in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things, full of marrow, of wines on the lees well-refined. The gospel makes ample provision for all the wants of men. It withholds from them no good thing. It furnishes them with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus—blessings exquisite in their nature, extensive in their range, and eternal in their duration—all that is comprehended in pardon, holiness, and heaven. But those who would rather starve than come to this feast for supplies, shall surely have their choice—they must in-

evitably starve. They give their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which satisfieth not. They are making a fatal experiment—trying to support a spiritual nature by feeding on ashes, the serpent's food, and on the husks that the swine do eat; the result is certain—they must “perish with hunger.” Their sins becomes their punishment. They will not accept the kind invitation, so earnestly and repeatedly pressed upon them in the day of their visitation—how congruous, how just, therefore, the retributive sentence of slighted Mercy and insulted Majesty, “None of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper!” Let those who pray to be excused from attending the Gospel Feast, as if it were a trifling *pic nic*, rest assured that their prayer is heard, and will, in due time, be answered. That prayer will procure for them a fate, worse than that of the fabled wretch, who was doomed to famish eternally in full view, and almost within reach, of the most plentiful and delicious viands.

Hungry, thirsty, starving souls! accept the invitation. What excuse can you render to your God? What apology to your own reason and conscience, for its rejection? You dare not plead anything, which, in itself, is opposed to the gospel; but you might as well do this as to plead an undue regard for those things which, in themselves, are lawful—they become a sin and a snare to you, when you make them the occasion of your

neglecting the claims of Heaven? And will you put them in competition with those claims? You have bought, forsooth, a piece of ground, or fine yoke of oxen, or you have married a wife, and therefore you cannot come to the Gospel Feast? And these are your excuses? Great God! what apologies for insulting thy majesty, and despising the riches of thy goodness!

You also neglect the great salvation, because you do not think it great—you slight the Gospel Message, because you do not consider it “good tidings of great joy”—before you determine on its final rejection, we beg you to bear in mind that it is true, divinely true, “a faithful saying,” and, for aught that has ever been shown to the contrary, it is “worthy of all acceptance;” and we counsel you to canvass its claims with candor and seriousness, in view of its divine original, the wonderful medium of its communication to man, and the consequences which attend its reception or its rejection, the weight of which eternity alone can tell; for “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

H Y M N .

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast ;
Let every soul be Jesus' guest ;
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden all mankind.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call,
The invitation is to all ;
Come, all the world! come, sinner, thou !
All things in Christ are ready now.

Come, all ye souls by sin oppress'd,
Ye restless wand'ers after rest ;
Ye poor, and maim'd, and halt, and blind,
In Christ a hearty welcome find.

My message as from God receive :
Ye all may come to Christ and live ;
O let your hearts his love constrain,
Nor suffer him to die in vain !

See him set forth before your eyes,
That precious, bleeding sacrifice !
His offer'd benefits embrace,
And freely now be saved by grace.

ON CONVERSION

[*From Dr. Gregory's Letters on the Evidences, Doctrines and Duties of the Christian Religion.*]

Perhaps it may not be uninteresting for us to fix our attention upon the leading particulars of some remarkable and well authenticated instance of conversion; and to this end allow me to select that of the Earl of Rochester, to which I adverted in my Letter on Prophecy. In respect to the evidence of the permanency of the change, the examples of Colonel Gardiner, Mr. Newton; and Mr. Scott are doubtless more decisive; but in these last mentioned cases the historians may by some be deemed suspicious witnesses, on account of the theological sentiments they supported; I therefore have chosen the instance which was thought worthy the attention of Bishop Burnet, a writer whom no candid reader will accuse of proneness to fanaticism.

Lord Rochester was distinguished through the active part of his life as a great wit, and a great profligate, an open and unwearied advocate of atheism. He had, however, especially during the last year of his life, strong convictions of the folly of his conduct; and once, after he had been arguing vehemently against the existence of a supreme Being, he exclaimed, on retiring from the company, "Good God, that a man who walks upright, who sees the wonderful works of God, and has the use of his reason,—that such a one should bid defiance to his Creator!" but impressions like these soon wore off:

so that it was not till his last illness, which continued about nine weeks, that he appears to have been the subject of the change which we denominate conversion. Then it was, according to his own account, that he first saw the enormity of sin, and learned the value of the atonement on which his hopes of pardon were founded. "Shall the joys of heaven," exclaimed he, "be conferred on me? O mighty Savior, never, but through thy infinite love and satisfaction! O never, but by the purchase of thy blood!"

The Scriptures, which had so often been the subject of his merriment, now secured his esteem, and impressed him with delight; for they had spoken to his *heart*: the seeming absurdities and contradictions vanished; and he thenceforward not only received the truth but adhered to it. It appears to have been the 53d chapter of Isaiah, which was repeatedly read to him by Mr. Parsons, his chaplain, that was principally instrumental in the change. Comparing it with the history of our Savior's passion, he saw the fulfilment of a prophecy, written several ages before, and which the Jews, who blasphemed Jesus, still kept in their hand, as an inspired book. He confessed to Bishop Burnet, that, as he heard it read, "he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his mind and convince him, that he could resist it no longer; for the words had an authority, which did shoot like rays or beams in his mind, so that he was not only convinced by the reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a *power* which did so effectually *constrain him*, that he did ever after as firmly believe in his Savior as if

He had this chapter read so often to him that he "got it by heart, and went through a great part of it," says the Bishop, "in discourse with me, with a sort of heavenly pleasure, giving me his reflections on it: some of which I remember. "Who hath believed our report?" "Here," he said, "was foretold the opposition the Gospel was to meet with from such wretches as he was." "He hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." On this he said, "the meanness of his appearance and person has made vain and foolish people disparage him, because he came not in such a fool's coat as they delighted in." Many other observations he made which were not noted down; enlarging on many passages with a degree of heavenly pleasure, and applying various parts of it to his own humiliation and comfort. "O, my God," he would say, "can such a creature as I, who have denied thy being and contemned thy power, be accepted by thee? Can there be mercy and pardon for me? Will God own such a wretch as I am?"

His faith now rested on Christ alone for salvation, and often would he entreat God to strengthen it; crying out, "Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief." He gave numerous proofs of the depth of his repentance: among which his earnest desire to check and diminish the evil effects of his former writings, and too uniform example, deserve particular recollection. His abhorrence of sin was now as extraordinary as his former indulgence in it: he said more than once, "he would not commit a *known* crime to gain a kingdom."

* * * * *

“Having understood all these things from him, and being pressed to give him my opinion plainly about his eternal state, I told him, that though the promises of the Gospel did all depend upon *a real change of heart and life*, as the indispensable condition upon which they were made, and that it was scarcely possible to know certainly whether our hearts are changed, unless it appeared in our lives; and the repentance of most dying men being like the howlings of condemned prisoners for pardon, which flowed from no sense of their crimes, but from the horror of approaching death; there was little reason to encourage any hope from such sorrowing: yet certainly if the mind of a sinner, even on a death-bed, be ‘truly renewed and turned to God,’ so great is his mercy that he will receive him, even in that extremity. He said that ‘he was sure his mind was entirely turned; and though *horror* had given him his first awakening, yet that was now grown up into a *settled faith and conversion.*’ ”

This narration naturally suggests several reflections: but these I must leave to your own meditations; and proceed to answer a few questions which arise out of the subject now before us.

1. Is conversion absolutely necessary?

If this question is to be decided by the uniform tenor of Scripture, it *must* be answered in the affirmative. Some persons, I am aware, will tell you, that, however necessary this great change may be among heathens, it is not universally requisite in a christian country. But this notion is founded upon a very inadequate view of the subject.

By nature all are Gentiles. We are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Eph. 2: 3. Whether men bow down to idols of wood and stone, or are immersed in the cares, or idolizing the amusements of this world, they may be equally distant from God, and equally need an entire change of *heart* to bring them to his spiritual presence, and restore them to his favor. "Those (says Bishop Tomline) who call themselves christians, but attend neither to the doctrines nor to the duties of the Gospel, seem to differ but little, with respect to the point now under consideration, from those to whom the Gospel was first preached. 'The process in both must be nearly the same.'" Both classes are descended from the corrupt stock of Adam, both are influenced by improper motives, both are strangers to "Christ the hope of glory;" both are "in the bond of iniquity," whether they are conscious of it or not; and therefore "*must* be born again." The necessity for this change is doubtless as extensive as that great moral declension from which it is the object of the christian dispensation to restore mankind: so that since "*all* have sinned," are shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, *all* must undergo a total change, or they "cannot see the kingdom of God." Rom. 5: 12; Psalm 51: 5; John, 3: 3. Indeed nothing in religion can be more evident than that "if we be bound on earth, we shall be bound in heaven;" if we be absolved here, we shall be loosed there: for, in this sense, "where the tree falleth there it shall be." Eccl. 11: 3. Hence the prophets who preceded our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and the apostles who were commissioned to succeed him, all agreed in de-

elaring that no unregenerate person shall enter the kingdom of God. The reason of this is obvious, both from the nature of God and from that of man. "No unclean thing" can be admitted into the presence of God (who "cannot bear iniquity" but with abhorrence,) nor into the regions of universal holiness and purity. And on the other hand, if an unregenerate soul *could* be admitted, heaven would furnish no delight. Such a spirit would be incapable of relishing the happiness of a future world: for the knowledge there communicated, the enjoyments there experienced, are of a kind he never aspired after. The holiness of heaven, the sight and service of God and of a glorified Redeemer, the society of angels and of saints made perfect, the "singing the song of Moses and the Lamb," would all be tasteless and insipid, if not disgusting, to one who had been a stranger to the employments and gratifications of religion while on earth. To believe otherwise would be to believe that a man could be regenerate and unregenerate at the same time. "The happiness of heaven (said good old Richard Baxter) is *holiness* and to talk of being happy without it, is as palpable nonsense, as to talk of being well without health, or of being saved without salvation."

2. Is the exact era of this great renovation of character always assignable?

Certainly not: though in many cases it is. In the momentous business of regeneration "there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." 1 Cor. 12: 6. Through the blessing of God upon early instruction, the seeds of grace have been sown in

the hearts of many during infancy. God ordains strength "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," Psalm 8: 2, and enables them to give evidence at six or seven years of age that their hearts are principally fixed on "Christ and things divine." These, of course, cannot assign the period of their conversion. Others again, and perhaps the greater number of those who have had the benefit of a religious education, are led by the suasive influence of Divine grace through such insensible gradations that they are unable to specify any remarkable circumstances attending their conversion, or to point out the particular time when it occurred. But others, and especially those who have passed their lives heedless of religion, or those who have allowed themselves in the course and habit of some particular sin, in whom there must be not only a complete revolution of principle but a total change of conduct, are commonly roused by some alarming or some afflictive dispensation of Providence, to "flee from the wrath to come," and eagerly inquire what they must do to be saved?" Acts, 16: 30. To such persons, says Dr. Paley, "conversion is too momentous an event ever to be forgot. A man might as easily *forget his escape from shipwreck.*" And though, says good Bishop Taylor, "after the manner of this life our recollection is imperfect, yet the greatest changes of our state of grace or sin are *always present*, like capital letters to an aged and dim eye." "It may not be necessary (says Paley again) for a man to *speak* of his conversion, but he will always *think* of it with unbounded thankfulness to the Giver of all grace, the Author of all mercies, spiritual as well as temporal."

3. Is this important change ever sudden?

Most, if not all of the instances of conversion recorded in the New Testament were sudden. This operation of God on the souls of men was then frequently instantaneous, and they were transformed from unbelievers to believers at once: the Spirit fell on them while they heard the word; Acts, 10: 44: and in consequence of this miraculous effusion, they who had just before professed Judaism or Polytheism, and neither knew nor loved Jesus Christ, at once confessed his name, and felt the power of his religion. But many moderns contend that sudden conversions, such as those to which we now advert, were confined to the apostolic times: as if the *common* operations of the Spirit were not sufficient to produce any *rapid* change. Yet I conceive it requires but slight reflection to see that this their opinion comports neither with the declarations of Scripture, nor with the usual phenomena of intellect or rules of action. Does not "God work in us both to will and to do" now as well as in the primitive times? Cannot the eyes of our understanding be as effectually and as speedily enlightened by the spirit of wisdom now as then? Was the promise of bestowing a new spirit, and taking away the stony heart, confined to the early ages; or is "God's arm shortened, or weakened, that he cannot reach and at once turn our spirits now, as he has done with others before us?" And, with regard to operations upon the mind, do men yield to them while the impressions are *strong*, or do they wait till they become weaker, and then give way? When a man is thoroughly persuaded, that the course in which he is perse-

vering is imminently dangerous, does he not *immediately* quit it? When he is convinced that the road in which he travels is conducting him *from* the place he wishes to reach, and is being infested with robbers or beset with difficulties, does he not immediately come to a stand? And if a path be pointed out which is both direct and safe, will he not with cheerfulness and alacrity pursue his journey in that newly discovered path, and press forward to regain the time lost in the wrong road? Apply this reasoning to religion, and you will perceive that conversion not only *may* be, but in many cases is *necessarily* sudden.

“Some men (says Tillotson), by an extraordinary power of God’s grace upon their hearts, are *suddenly changed*, and wonderfully reclaimed from a very wicked and vicious, to a very religious and virtuous course of life; and that which others attain by slower degrees, and great conflicts with themselves, before they can gain the upper hand of their lusts, these arrive at *all of a sudden* by a mighty revolution wrought in them by the power of God’s grace, and, as it were, by a new bias and inclination put upon their souls.” Works, vol. 2. Baxter, in his Directions for Spiritual Peace, says, “When you are weighing things in a balance, you may add grain to grain, and it makes no turning or motion at all, till you come to the very last grain; and then *suddenly* that end which was downward is turned upward. When you stand at a loss between two highways, not knowing which way to go, as long as you deliberate, you stand still: all the reasons that come into your mind do not stir you: but the last reason which re-

solves you, setteth you in motion. So is it in the change of a sinner's heart and life. He is not changed (but preparing towards it) while he is but deliberating whether he should choose Christ or the world. But the last reason that comes in and determineth his will to Christ, and makes him resolve and enter a firm covenant with Christ, and say, *I will have Christ for better or worse*, this maketh the greatest change that ever is made by any work in this world. For how can there be greater than the turning of a soul from the creature to the Creator? so distant are the terms of this change. After this one turning act Christ bath that heart, and the main bent and endeavors of the life, which the world had before. The man hath a new end, a new rule, a new guide, a new master."

The denial of the suddenness of the change seems to have arisen from the confounding of two very distinct things, regeneration and sanctification. The former of these is the commencement of spiritual *life*, the other is spiritual or religious *growth*: the former is a "passing from death unto life," the latter a "changing from glory to glory;" and both "by the Spirit of the living God." If this distinction were duly attended to, I think the question would be set at rest.

4. May a person always know when he is in a converted state?

Probably not: but he may always with perfect ease ascertain the contrary. If he cherish worldly-mindedness or an unholy disposition, if he allow himself in the practice of any known sin, if he habitually neglect public worship or private communion with God, if allusions to

conversion by others either excite his ridicule or provoke his wrath, he need waste no more time to inquire whether his religious state be safe, than to ask whether heavy bodies fall downwards when left to themselves, whether opium is soporific, or ardent spirits productive of intoxication. On the other hand, if, as Paley remarks, "he *allow* himself in no sin whatever, but, cost what it may, contends against and combats *all* sin:" if he sedulously cultivate a holy disposition, and "grow in grace," in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, and in the steady practice of all the relative duties, he may *hope* that his spiritual life is commenced.

Still, as we live in times of much religious delusion and infatuation, let him not be satisfied, let him cherish nothing like *assurance*, unless he uniformly feel tenderness of conscience and a desire to increase his religious attainments. Let him then "*examine* himself whether he be in the faith." Let him seriously endeavor to ascertain whether he has eternal life wrought in his heart; whether he finds any satisfaction of soul in drawing near to God through a Mediator; whether he has an increasing sincere love to God; whether he has a rooted aversion to all sin; whether he has in any measure "overcome the world" as they who believe that Jesus is the Son of God and have put their trust in him; whether his desires to escape the miseries of hell, however strong, are weaker than his desires after holiness and heaven; whether he is zealous in God's service, aims at his glory, delights in his presence, and in doing his "will on earth as it is done in heaven;" whether he can forgive enemies, can *sincerely*

return blessing for cursing; whether he is anxious not simply to stand, but to "*run in the way of God's commandments.*" In religion there is no standing still: if we are actuated by true religious principles, they will continually impel us forward, and cause us, with Paul, to "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Phil. 3: 14.

Be it remembered, then, that true repentance and conversion reduce all holy resolutions to action, and either thus produce true practical religion, or transfer it from the head to the heart, there to reside *permanently* as an actuating principle. "He that resolves to live well when a danger is upon him, or a violent fear, or when the appetites of lust are newly satisfied or newly served, *yet*, when the temptation comes again, sins again, and then is sorrowful, and resolves once more against it, and *yet* falls when the temptation returns, is no true penitent, and is very far from salvation: for, if it be necessary that we *resolve* to live well, it is necessary we should *do* so. For resolution is an imperfect act, a term of relation, and signifies nothing but in order to action. It is as a faculty is to the act, as spring to the harvest, as a relative to its correspondent, nothing without it. No man, therefore, can be in a state of grace and actual favor by mere resolutions and holy purposes; these are but the gate or portal towards pardon: a HOLY LIFE is the only perfection of repentance, and the firm ground upon which we can cast the anchor of hope in the mercies of God, through Jesus Christ." Holy Living, ch. iii.

